



The Independent Voice of
the University of
Tennessee at Martin

Iran war continues, 13 U.S. killed

Associated Press

U.S. President Donald Trump fumed in a post Tuesday, saying “WE DO NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE” to break Iran’s grip on the Strait of Hormuz. As the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran rages, analysts say it’s extremely dangerous for vessels to pass through the strait, where they’re vulnerable to attack from Iran’s anti-ship missiles, drones or mines. The effects are being felt in rising gas prices as sharply reduced energy supplies destabilize economies.

Israel announced Tuesday that its military killed top Iranian security official Ali Larijani in an overnight strike, and killed Gen. Gholam Reza Soleimani as he met in a combat tent with commanders of the Revolutionary Guard’s all-volunteer Basij force. The Iran judiciary’s news agency later confirmed Soleimani’s death, but Iran has not confirmed or denied the killing of Larijani. Both men were key to Iran’s violent crackdown on protests in January. Gulf Arab nations faced more missile and drone fire Tuesday from Iran, which has been targeting

regional oil infrastructure. Israel also launched new strikes on Iran and Lebanon. In Iraq, officials say drones hit the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad, where an Associated Press journalist saw a massive fire. The war has killed at least 1,300 people in Iran, more than 900 in Lebanon and 12 in Israel, according to officials in those countries. The U.S. military says 13 U.S. service members have been killed and about 200 wounded. **Head of counterterrorism resigns** Joe Kent, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, announced

his resignation on Tuesday, citing his concerns about the justification for military strikes in Iran and saying he “cannot in good conscience” back the Trump administration’s war. “Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby,” Kent said in a statement posted on social media, making claims President Donald Trump has denied.

See IRAN (pg 9) for continued story

Holy COW: Gov. Lee proposes \$4.2 million investment in UT Martin cattle facilities



A calf at the Beef Cattle Teaching Center on March 13, 2026 in Martin. (Pacer Photo / Darby Self)

Ella Hasty | Pacer Staff

In Gov. Bill Lee’s 2026-2027 proposed state budget, \$4.23 million is allocated to an advanced Cattle Outreach and Workforce (COW) Facility to the University of Tennessee at Martin. Individuals at UT Martin have been working nearly eight years to provide an advanced cattle facility that will better educate students and prepare them for the workforce. After years of hard work, the light at the end of the tunnel is shining through. Todd Winters, dean of the UT Martin College of Agriculture and Applied Science, has worked hard to make this dream a reality. After many meetings with legislators, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, university officials, the UT Institute of Agriculture and more, he spread awareness for the need for this facility. He received support from many groups, including UT System President Randy Boyd who made it a priority for the university system. An advisory board of local cattle producers was formed to hear their opinions on what would be most beneficial for them. The board indicated there was a need for the facility to have an emphasis on reproduction.

See COW (pg 4) for continued story

UTM student Houston Kelly appears on “The Voice”

Ja'Tyria Greer | Pacer Staff

A University of Tennessee at Martin student is taking his musical talents to a national stage after appearing on Season 29 of “The Voice” and earning a spot on Kelly Clarkson’s team. Houston Kelly, a senior agricultural business major from Memphis, Tennessee, said his passion for performing began at an early age within his family. “Growing up in a musical family was what spurred on my love for music,” Kelly said. “I started off as a pianist, and I still am today.”

That early interest in playing piano eventually expanded into singing, something Kelly said happened naturally over time with encouragement from those around him. “This love for making music naturally led me to sing more and more,” Kelly said. “With my support system pushing me to be the best I can be, that is exactly what happened.” Kelly’s dedication to his craft eventually led him to audition for the popular NBC competition series, where singers perform blind auditions in hopes of impressing celebrity coaches. His journey to the show,

however, was not immediate. “I wanted to see if I could do it,” Kelly said. “I have always been someone who wants to take on challenges, and this is certainly one.” Kelly said he auditioned multiple times before finally earning a spot on the show. After earlier setbacks, he said perseverance and faith played an important role in his eventual success. “I tried out a few times before and never got a shot,” Kelly said.

See KELLY (pg 4) for continued story



(Photo Credit / NBC The Voice)

HAWK SPOT!

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- Sunshine

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Seek Truth

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Fall 2025

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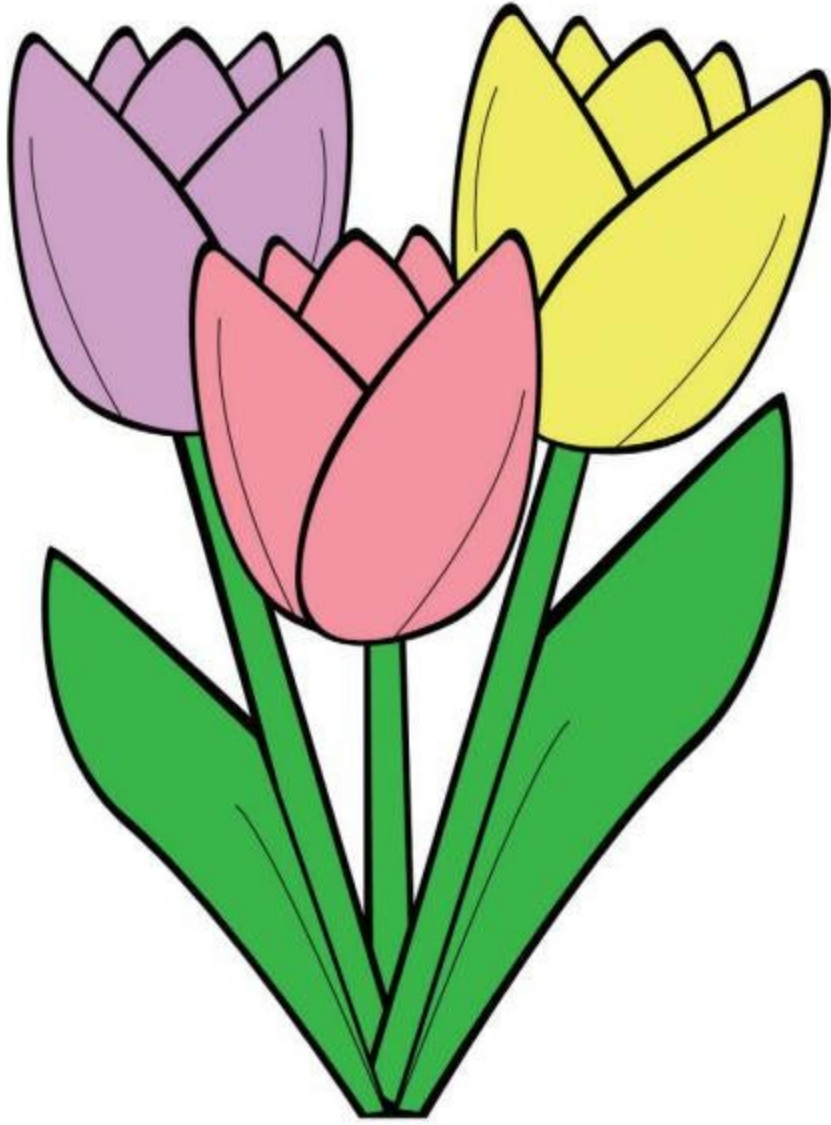
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(Pacer Graphics / Miranda Conrad)

YOUR ZODIAC SIGN YOUR SPRING BREAK PREDICTION

Aries: Congrats! You got a call back from your internship application.

Taurus: You got an Airbnb? Not anymore, you got kicked out.

Gemini: Whoops, got the Flu.

Cancer: Your dad is proud of you! (We hope)

Leo: You binged your favorite show for the 20th time.

Virgo: It's okay, you can take a break now.

Libra: Your professors decide to assign homework over break.

Scorpio: That test you took has a really positive outcome.

Sagittarius: Your team makes it into the Sweet 16.

Capricorn: Your roommate will do the dishes without being asked.

Aquarius: You will donate to The Pacer for Captain's Challenge

Pisces: Surprise! The speed trap caught you.

UT Martin seeks input on new Business building

Ja'Tyria Greer | Pacer Staff

Students and faculty at the University of Tennessee at Martin had the opportunity on Wednesday, March 4 to share their ideas about the future of the university's business facilities as planning continues for a new business building on campus.

The new building will replace the current Business Administration Building and will be constructed on the same site once the existing structure is demolished. University officials say the project is part of a larger effort to modernize academic spaces and support the continued growth of the university.

The design process is being led by the architecture firm Perkins&Will, which is working with campus leaders to create a facility that reflects how students learn today.

Architect Jill Vowels said gathering input from the campus community is an important part of the early design stages.

"We're just gathering feedback for the new business school building," Vowels said. "We're looking for broad input from across the campus community."

During a campus engagement event, students were invited to review concept ideas and provide feedback by placing markers next to features they considered most important. Designers also encouraged participants to complete surveys using QR codes to help measure which priorities were most common among attendees.

Vowels explained that the project will involve constructing



UT Martin's Business Administration Building is pictured on campus Friday, March 13, 2026. (Pacer Photo / Miranda Conrad)

an entirely new facility rather than renovating the existing one.

"It will be constructed on the existing site," Vowels said. "The current building would be demolished, and the new building would take its place."

Feedback from students and faculty highlighted several key priorities, including flexible classroom spaces, improved technology and additional areas for collaboration.

"We've heard a lot of comments about focusing on flexible types of classrooms," Vowels said. "There's also been feedback about the lack of community space in the existing building."

Flexible classrooms, which often include movable seating and technology designed for group collaboration,

have become increasingly common in modern academic buildings. Designers say these types of spaces allow instructors to easily transition between lectures, discussions and team-based learning.

While the new business building is still in the planning stages, university officials say it is one of several major facility improvements happening across campus.

According to Karen Elmore, who has worked at UT Martin for about 50 years, the number of recent construction projects represents a significant moment in the university's history.

"We're getting a new academic building," Elmore said. "It's been about 40 years since we built Gooch, so to get buildings back-

to-back like this is surprising."

Elmore noted that the new business building will be located near the site of the original Moody building and is part of a larger group of campus upgrades, including the addition of a new testing hub.

"We're getting three new facilities," Elmore said. "In six months since we finished the book about the university's history, so much has already changed."

Having worked at the university for decades, Elmore has seen both periods of growth and times when campus expansion was difficult.

"I've seen good times, bad times, needing buildings and not being able to get them," said Elmore. "Programs were growing and we were taking up closets to fit students in."

Now, she says the current wave of construction is exciting for the university community.

"We've ground broken on two of them already," Elmore said. "I'm just overwhelmed. It's exciting to see where the university is headed."

As planning continues, designers will use the feedback gathered from students and faculty to shape the final design of the new business building. University officials say the project will help create modern learning spaces that better serve students, prepare them for careers in business and related fields and contribute to the continued growth of UT Martin.

New social work master's program in final stretch

Ella Hasty | Pacer Staff

For nearly two decades, the University of Tennessee at Martin's social work department has had a goal of developing a master's program in social work on campus. After years of surveys, research, accreditation and approvals, the program is now accepting applications and has almost reached the checkered flag.

Cindy West, former dean of the College of Education, Health and Behavioral Sciences at UT Martin, initiated the process of beginning the program in the early 2000s. Since then, the department has done three need assessments that showed an overwhelming desire for a master's program. However, the positive feedback from surveys is not enough to start a program. It takes an extensive amount of time and resources to get the program approved and official.

Alicia Donaldson, Social Work Program Director at UT Martin, has been full-time with the program since January 2009. Donaldson explains that a large reason why it takes as long as it does is due to the additional accreditations that social work programs require.

"In our profession, if people in

social work don't graduate from an accredited program, then their degree is not really usable in almost all areas," Donaldson said. "Maintaining that external accreditation through CSWE (Council on Social Work Education) is an absolute must."

The requirements for CSWE can be challenging for universities, as it is very expensive. Money was a roadblock in previous years, until a change in the requirements happened in 2022.

Universities were originally required to hire six full-time faculty dedicated to the master's program prior to having students in the course, Donaldson explained. The standards have since changed from six to four full-time faculty, which was more doable for UT Martin.

In the summer of 2024, Lisa Clifton was hired to be the director of the master's program. She got the program approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and all the state approvals necessary before the CSWE accreditation. Unfortunately, due to family circumstances, Clifton had to move back home.

After Clifton's departure, Katrinna Matthews was named the program director of the master's program

in the summer of 2025. She has gotten the program through the next set of approvals with CSWE.

"We now have what is called pre-candidacy status," said Matthews. "This spring, we'll have a site visit from CSWE to hopefully greenlight us and say, 'okay, you're good to go.'"

Once they receive this "greenlight," they can accept their first cohort of students for fall 2026. They have already opened the application process and are reviewing the many applications that have been submitted.

Chancellor Yancy Freeman and the institution have been very supportive of the creation of this program.

"He identified that one of the most frequent questions that he was getting when he was out in the community listening to other schools was 'when are you going to get a master's program in social work?'" Donaldson said.

The program is open to students of any undergraduate major and will take two years to complete. For social work undergraduates, they will receive advanced standing and can complete the master's program in only a year due to already having the foundation of social work knowledge needed for the master's degree.

"It [social work] is a wonderful profession, but to have the greatest impact, both personally as well as professionally, you do need a master's degree," Matthews said.

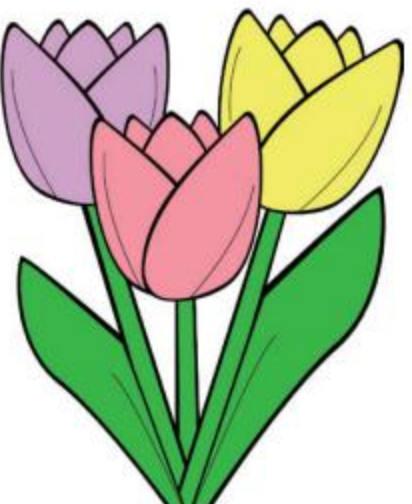
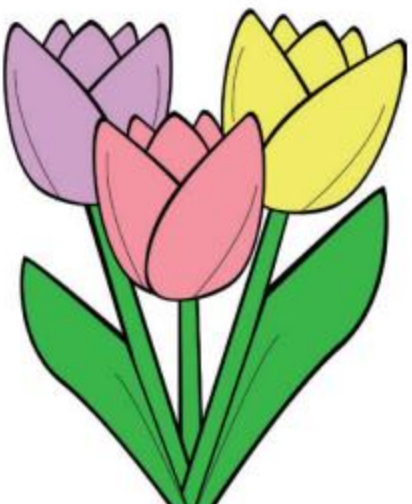
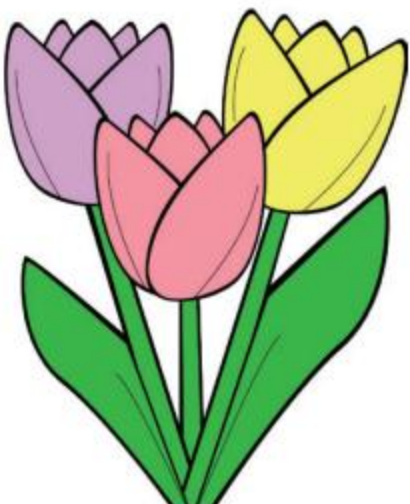
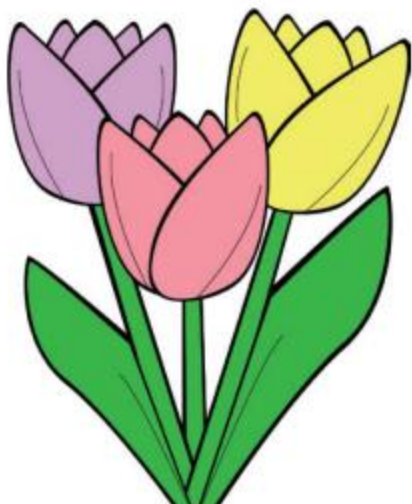
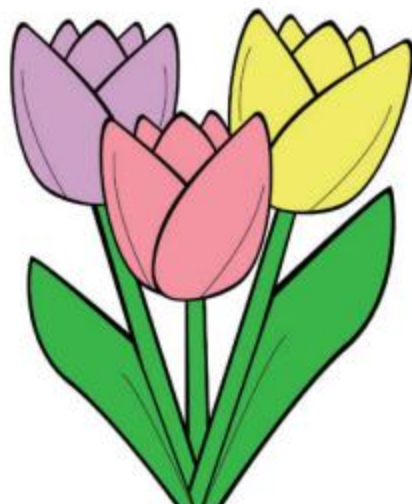
What makes UT Martin's master's program stand out from others is its specialization in rural communities. The department wants to meet the needs of the immediate community by focusing on the diverse, yet specialized issues that arise in rural areas.

"We won't just be creating another program to have a program. We'll be creating a program that is going to directly impact this community," Matthews said. "I'm excited that we're about to create practitioners who are going to be able to go out and serve in some of these places that have been underserved for so long."

Bella Allen, a current UT Martin senior in the undergraduate social work program, has applied for the master's program.

"I am really excited, and I am hoping this will help me figure out how to help those in rural communities," Allen said.

The accepted students will be a part of the first cohort starting in August 2026.





New book offers look at 125 years of UT Martin

Ja'Tyria Greer | Pacer Staff

A new book celebrating the history of University of Tennessee at Martin offers a visual journey through 125 years of growth, traditions and memorable moments on campus. Contributors Samuel Richardson, Nathan Morgan and Karen Elmore created the recently released commemorative book. Published to coincide with the university's 125th anniversary, the project combined historical research with archival photography to highlight the evolution of the institution from its earliest days to the present. According to Samuel Richardson, the idea for the project began years before the anniversary itself. He started gathering photographs several years ago while considering ways to expand on an earlier book that commemorated the university's 100th anniversary. "Actually, what became the inspiration was the 125th anniversary coming up," Richardson said. "We already had a book that commemorates the 100th anniversary, and we were deciding whether we should update it with the next 25 years or create something completely different. We decided to come up with a different type of book."

The result is a photo-driven publication that traces the institution's transformation over more than a century. The book begins with the early days of the Hall-Moody Institute, the small Baptist school that originally occupied the site in Martin, before following the campus through its transition to a junior college, then a four-year institution and eventually the modern university it is today. Nathan Morgan, who works in the university's Office of University Relations, said the department's extensive photo archives helped shape the stories that appear in the book. "Our office does the news releases and photography for the university, and we have an archive of photography from the past 25 years," said Morgan. "Because this is primarily a photo book, what we had photographs of played a big role in what we were able to include." The team compiled long lists of potential events, people and moments before they narrowed them down to fit the publisher's format. The book was ultimately limited to 228 pages. Several stories were left out simply because of space or the absence of photographs. One story Richardson wished could have been included involved a performance by legendary musician

Prince in the early 1980s before he rose to global fame. However, without a photograph documenting the concert, it could not be featured. Still, the research process uncovered several surprising discoveries. The authors learned that future music stars such as Billy Joel once performed on campus early in their careers. They also found references suggesting bands like ACDC played in Martin before reaching mainstream popularity. Other unexpected findings came from old campus publications and archives. Morgan said the student newspaper or earlier publications like The Volette proved to be a valuable resource for confirming events and uncovering unusual campus stories. One article from the early 1920s described a small zoo that once existed in Martin. When the zoo closed, larger animals were transferred to Memphis while smaller animals such as squirrels were released locally—a detail some jokingly say explains the abundance of squirrels on campus today. The authors said one of the most fascinating aspects of researching the book was realizing how much campus life has changed and how much has stayed the same. Old articles revealed students complaining about

parking shortages and roommate conflicts decades ago, issues that still resonate with students today. For Karen Elmore, one story in the book perfectly represents the university's impact. It focuses on former Skyhawk basketball player Lester Hudson, who arrived at UT Martin from Memphis and eventually went on to play professionally in the NBA and overseas. "To me, it embodies what UT Martin does," she said. "We wrap our arms around students and help them succeed." Although the book captured more than a century of history, the authors see it as a snapshot rather than a final chapter. Since the book's completion, the university continues to grow with new academic buildings, residence halls and expanding enrollment. "In the past 125 years, this property has always been an educational institution," Morgan said. "It's fascinating to think about how many generations have come here to learn." Even so, the contributors believe the book preserves something timeless about the institution, the sense of community and support that has defined the campus for generations.

COW from page 1

"The facility is kind of going to be like a cattle IVF clinic out there," Winters said. "We'll have surrogate recipient animals and do embryo transfers to really improve the genetics of the beef cattle herd here in Tennessee." While the current 60-year-old facility has a setup for artificial insemination, the new facility is going to be much more advanced. It will allow students to work with updated technology and methods of artificial insemination. In addition, a classroom and laboratory are included at the new facility. "All of our ag students can get something out of this," Winters said. For example, animal and vet

science students can gain experience in reproductive technologies; plant and soil science students can work with forages; farm and ranch management students can get hands-on management experience. UT Martin students will not be the only ones to reap the benefits of the COW facility. Workshops on various topics such as artificial insemination, animal health and animal nutrition are planned to be provided to local producers and high school agricultural programs. Danny Morris, a UT Martin agricultural economics professor, determined that the workshops and outreach programs would have an additional economic impact of \$521,839 per year and the facility's total economic impact would be \$2,673,000. This study

does not include the economic impact of graduates entering the workforce. The budget still must go through the state legislature to get approval. From there, the university goes through a second planning stage that gets into the specifics of the architectural renderings. If approved, the facility will be built on a 40-acre plot on Hyndsver Road in Martin near the Sheep and Goat Facility. It will include one classroom, one laboratory and a covered barn with a complete cattle working system. Grace Gold, a junior animal science major at UT Martin, spoke on the new facility and the impact it will have on students. She grew up on a dairy farm and is certified in artificial insemination. "It will definitely be nice having the classrooms there, so then you can just be right there with the

cattle," Gold said. "You can go out, and you can already have the cattle there in the chutes, ready to go." The COW facility will help make classes more efficient and give more opportunities for students to spend time with the cattle who haven't had the chance before. With the diverse opportunities the proposed facility brings, Gold could see more classes being held in the facility with a hands-on component. The Tennessee General Assembly is expected to vote on the 2026-2027 budget this spring. If the budget passes, the university will begin the second stage of planning and begin to move forward. "It'll be really beneficial for farmers, students and educators," Gold said.

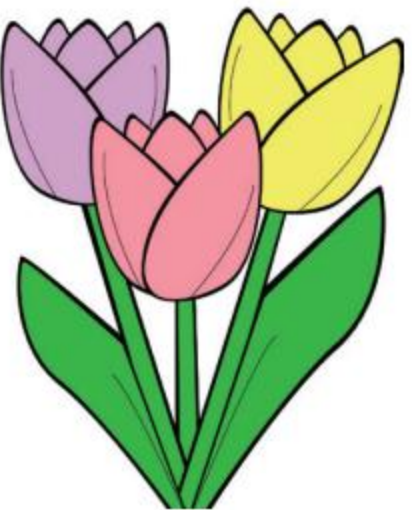
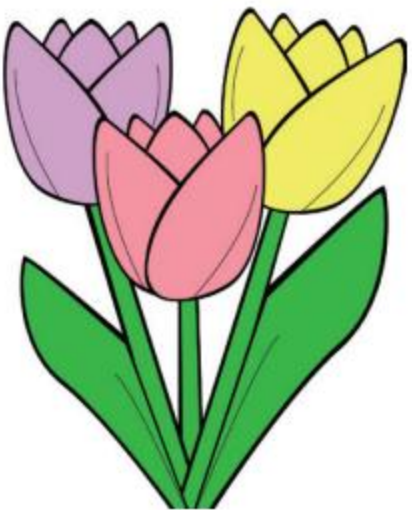
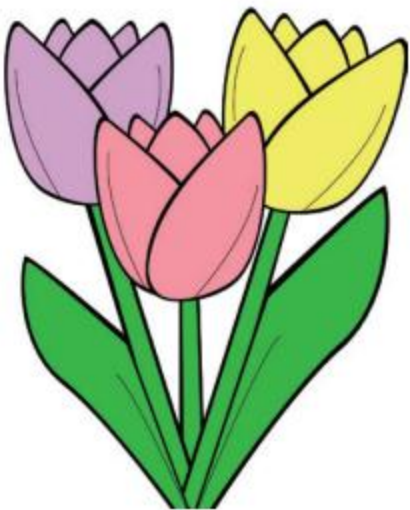
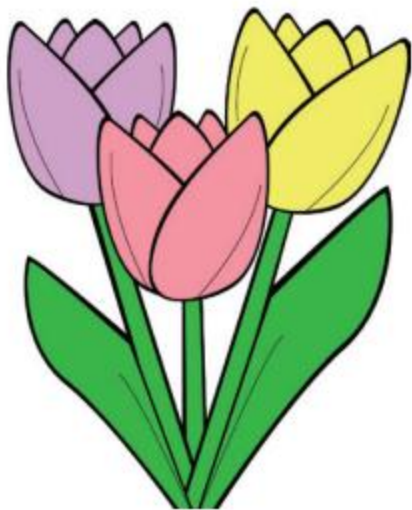
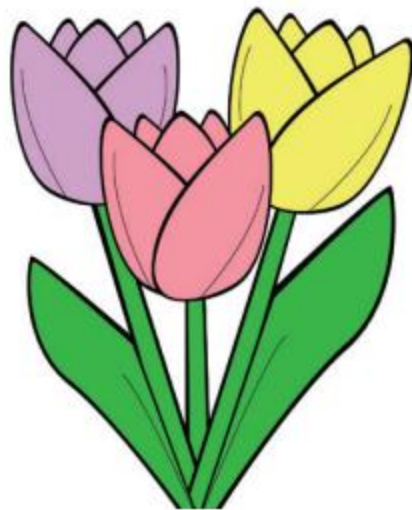
KELLY from page 1

"But when I put my faith in the Lord to make it what He wanted this experience to be, the doors opened." During his blind audition, Kelly impressed Clarkson enough to earn a chair turn and secure a place on her team for the season. While the national exposure was exciting, Kelly said some of his favorite moments came from the friendships formed with other contestants during filming. "I loved spending time with my fellow contestants and getting to deepen our friendships together," Kelly said. "The coolest part of this whole thing is that my network of

known musicians across the U.S. expanded to a wild level over this time." One moment, however, stands out above the rest. "I think the memory I will hold closest was seeing my parents across the stage as soon as the double doors opened for the blind audition," Kelly said. "That was a really cool feeling and something I'll never forget." Performing on a nationally televised stage also gave Kelly a new perspective on music and personal identity. "Being on a stage like NBC offers changes the way I think about performing," Kelly said. "I realize now that my worth cannot be tied up in what happens on that stage." At the same time, he said the experience helped him grow as a performer and refine his artistry.

"I learned a whole lot about how to better myself as a performer, which is what I love," Kelly said. "That will go with me for years to come." Kelly said the emotional side of the competition proved to be one of the most challenging parts of the experience. After the blind auditions, he watched fellow contestants and friends leave the competition when they did not receive a chair turn. "I had many friends who didn't get a chair turn, and that means they are no longer going to be a part of the season," Kelly said. "That is hard to deal with." Despite those challenges, Kelly said the experience ultimately helped him become more confident in his musical identity. "I used to be a little self-conscious of what music I played or what I wanted

to sound like," Kelly said. "Now I know that there is only one Houston Kelly. In order for me to be the artist that I need to be, I have to be genuine." Kelly encourages other aspiring musicians not to give up when faced with setbacks. "Don't give up, and don't be discouraged," he said. "This was my third time trying out for the show." Looking ahead, Kelly plans to continue performing and sharing his music with audiences. He will also return to the UT Martin campus for a performance during the university's upcoming crawfish boil. "I will be playing the campus crawfish boil on April 6," Kelly said. "The band and I are super excited to come play for y'all and continue down this road. It's a blast."





The internet says doomsday, history says otherwise

Bethany Collins | Pacer Staff

If you’ve opened TikTok, X, Instagram Reels—or even your group chat—you’ve probably seen it: “World War III just started.” “Doomsday.” “We’re cooked.” The captions are dramatic, the clips are louder and the vibes are apocalyptic.

And yes: what’s happening with the U.S., Iran and Israel is serious. People are dying, the region is destabilizing, markets are reacting, oil is spiking and allies are moving militarily. That’s not nothing.

But “serious” is not the same thing as “doomsday,” and the constant end-of-the-world framing doesn’t inform students; it overwhelms them. What we’re seeing online is a familiar pattern: in a crisis, social media turns worst-case scenarios into the standard storyline, because fear is shareable and nuance is not.

Here’s the grounded version: this conflict can expand, and it can get worse. But the idea that escalation automatically becomes global nuclear war ignores how states actually behave when the costs are catastrophic, and how many guardrails (imperfect ones, but real ones) still exist.

Let me be clear on what is happening. The last several days have brought an escalation cycle across the region: continued U.S. and Israeli military action, Iranian retaliatory strikes in the Middle East and spillover effects hitting travel, markets and energy prices. Reports describe strikes and

counterstrikes rippling through multiple countries, including impacts on Gulf cities and U.S. assets in the region.

Meanwhile, the international system is trying to prevent a wider fire: NATO reportedly intercepted an Iranian missile headed toward Turkey’s airspace, and European countries have been pulled into defensive postures to protect citizens and interests. In Washington, Congress is already arguing over war powers and the limits of presidential authority in an open-ended conflict, and the Senate has rejected a resolution that would have constrained further strikes.

So no: this is not “just internet drama.” It’s a real conflict with real consequences. But also, it’s not the end of the world.

The main joke I’m seeing online is that World War III is next, and, well, that’s not the most logical next step. Major powers have powerful incentives to keep this contained.

A full-scale regional war is economically punishing for basically everyone, including countries not directly fighting. Even the possibility of disruption can move oil prices and shake markets. That matters because global economies are fragile in ways that politicians can’t meme away. When energy prices jump, it hits everything from shipping to groceries, which means leaders face pressure at home, not just abroad.

The escalation we’re hearing about is not linear; it’s a series of choices that

affect us all. Online, escalation gets framed like a domino chain: one strike equals automatic world war. In reality, escalation is a constant back-and-forth of decisions: how hard to hit, where to hit, what to avoid, what message to send, what red lines to enforce and how to signal that you don’t want the next step. Even when governments talk tough, they often leave space for de-escalation because the alternative can be uncontrollable.

This doesn’t mean leaders are always wise or moral. It means they are usually aware that a spiral can destroy their own position, their own economy and their own ability to govern.

A world war requires multiple major powers to commit to large-scale fighting. Right now, a lot of governments are trying to avoid exactly that. In the weeks leading up to this, even countries with complicated relationships in the region urged restraint and emphasized diplomacy as tensions rose. This doesn’t guarantee peace, but it’s a major reason why many regional crises do not become global ones.

The fear of nuclear war is real, but that same fear is the main deterrent we have right now. Students aren’t irrational for worrying about nukes. Nuclear anxiety exists because the stakes are horrifying. But that’s also why nuclear escalation remains relatively rare: the consequences are so catastrophic that states tend to treat it as the final taboo. “Doomsday” content flattens everything into the same

threat level; real-world strategy usually does the opposite by drawing lines between conventional conflict, regional escalation and nuclear thresholds.

The biggest problem we have as people who are watching this is that the doomsday framing makes people less engaged, not more informed. This framing makes students feel powerless, like history is a runaway train; it replaces critical thinking with doomscrolling and it encourages misinformation, because in panic mode, people share first and verify never.

The platforms reward the most intense interpretation. If one creator says “This is serious,” they get fewer clicks than the creator saying, “This is literally the end.”

But politics and foreign policy are not horror movie plots. They’re systems—ugly, human, complicated systems—where incentives, alliances, resources, domestic politics and international backlash all matter. The more we consume the crisis as entertainment, the less we understand what’s actually unfolding.

If you’re scared, that’s understandable. But fear isn’t analysis. The healthiest civic posture right now is steady-eyed attention: recognizing that the situation is dangerous, refusing to spread panic and demanding better information from the media we consume and the leaders who act in our name.

Because if every international crisis becomes “doomsday” online, we train ourselves to either go numb or freak out, and neither response helps anyone.

A Tennessee amendment would treat abortion as homicide

Keenan Wilson | Pacer Staff

According to Dessert News, a proposed amendment by two republican lawmakers in Tennessee would classify abortions as fetal homicide; as a result, those women would be subject to life imprisonment or death.

This amendment, co-sponsored by Rep. Jody Barrett and Sen. Mark Pody, says, “all preborn children should be protected with the same criminal and civil laws protecting the lives of born persons by repealing provisions that permit prenatal homicide and assault.”

Exceptions to this proposed amendment are only in the case of a miscarriage or “unintentional death of an unborn child” after “undertaking life-saving procedures” to save the life of the mother and “to save the life of the unborn child.”

According to Tennessee Lookout, this

bill was rejected by a Tennessee House committee due to a lack of support and did not make it to receiving a vote in the population Health Subcommittee.

While it is great that this proposal did not move forward, that does not mean that it is now completely harmless. When ideas like this are made, they spark conversations on the topic and make ideas like this more acceptable in the future.

Tennessee currently has some of the strictest abortion laws in the country, prohibiting abortion at any stage of pregnancy with almost no exceptions to this law. Adding the threat of life imprisonment or death to the table, even in a bill that will not make it through the House, only adds to the fear around the situation and makes it as if medical decisions are federal crimes.

That is a stark contrast to what the proposal is supposed to portray.

According to The Independent, the reason for this amendment proposal is to be for life and protect life. How does it count as protecting a life if you’re threatening to execute a woman?

This argument of whether states should classify abortions as legal or not has been an issue since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022. Since then, the argument has become more extreme on both sides of the argument.

This proposal is no different, sparking responses from both sides. In an X post, Clint Pressley, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, voiced his support.

“I am glad to support HB 570 and SB 738, two bills in the Tennessee legislature that would protect every preborn child in Tennessee from abortion,” he said. “By protecting the lives of preborn children with the same laws that protect people who are born,

we are simply loving our neighbors in the womb as ourselves.”

On the other side of this argument, Israel Cook, the state legislative counsel at the Center for Reproductive Rights, said, “There’s nothing pro-life about this bill,” according to The Hill.

No matter which side of the argument you lie on, I hope we can all see that the idea of death for an abortion is absurd and that we ask ourselves if the goal is to protect life or end it. Either way, this proposal should not have even been proposed.

Sadly, this extreme proposal will only make the topic more common in public and political conversations, and with speculation of groups like end abortion Now and the foundation to Abolish Abortion attempting to revive the bill in the coming year, today’s failed amendment may one day become feasible.

Tips and tricks for upcoming Cosplay season

Laur Davis | Pacer Staff

Conventions have everything a nerd could want, merch-wise.

Not only are they fun for people who want to collect trinkets from their favorite shows, games and movies, but a lot of people who enjoy cosplay love these conventions as well. There are conventions within a few hours of where most people live, and the season is coming up fast.

However, in the last 10 years, con-

goers have lost their etiquette and don’t know how to act at these conventions. If you can’t follow some of these core rules, regular convention-goers and cosplayers definitely won’t welcome you in the community.

If you see a cosplayer or a panelist that you like, do not reach out and touch them without consent. Especially do not call out for them overly loud.

You wouldn’t think this would need to be said, but people break these simple rules all the time. Cosplayers,

especially, are not the character that they are dressed up as.

The next thing that you should be wary of is roleplaying in public settings. Be mindful that other cosplayers and people may not be willing participants, so if they seem uncomfortable with your advance to roleplay, take a step back.

Respect panelists’ boundaries, but treat them like they’re human. You can ask them for a hug or pictures, but make sure to be respectful. They are there to

meet fans and people like yourself who like their work.

If you know these panelists are going to be there, make sure that you know what you want them to say or sign before you get there. Holding up the line isn’t cool.

See COSPLAY (pg 9) for continued story

2026 Oscars bring tough competition between actors

Bryant Steele | Pacer Staff

The Academy Awards saw some of the toughest competition it has had in a while for accolades this year. ABC broadcasted the 98th Academy Awards ceremony on Mar. 15, 2026, and it lived up to the hype that it built over the last few months. The host from last year, Conan O'Brien, returned as host once again to entertain the audience with silly antics and comedic guest speaker segments.

The Oscars had winners that it had never seen before, including Michael B. Jordan. Jordan was possibly the biggest winner of the night. He has never been nominated for, or won, an Oscar before this year, despite the fact that he's put out phenomenal work for years. This year, he was acknowledged by the Academy for his role(s) in "Sinners."

Jordan received the award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for his performance as gangster twin brothers Smoke and Stack. Jordan winning this was the predicted outcome by many viewers who have been keeping up with the Oscar awards as of late. His dedication to not one but two roles is an effort that was clearly not in vain. He made both brothers feel distinctly different from each other down to the way they stood.

On the other hand, Jessie Buckley was nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her role as grieving mother Agnes Shakespeare in "Hamnet." Buckley brings such passion to her role that it is easy to see how she won over her competitors. She had previously been nominated for Best Supporting Actress in 2022

for her role in "The Lost Daughter." Despite her loss here, she kept the same determination for her performance in "Hamnet," resulting in her win. Buckley deserved her flowers and more for her portrayal of Agnes which showed how she's not just the wife of Shakespeare but the mother of "Hamnet."

history by becoming the first woman and person of color to win the award for her work in Ryan Coogler's Sinners. This is a massive milestone for cinematography and it will likely inspire the next generation of filmmakers to work even harder to achieve the same level that Arkapaw has. She, alongside

across the industry as of late.

The Academy Awards is not only about celebrating a love of cinema, but also the people who make them. The Academy mainly showcases this with their annual "In Memoriam" segment, a section of the program dedicated to honoring directors, actors, producers and more in the industry that have passed away since the previous ceremony. This is always a lovely segment filled with such kind words for those who are gone, but this year the Academy received massive backlash for this segment.

A large number of craftspeople passed last year and not all of them were included in the segment. Workers like James Van Der Beek, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, Eric Dane and David Keighley are a few among the many who were left out of this segment. This caused outrage online from many who submitted these names in the hope that they would acknowledge them during the broadcast.

The Academy has since responded, stating that the choice was made by a committee made up of different members across the organization. This committee is responsible for going through this list of names and determining which ones will appear during the broadcast, taking the runtime of the ceremony into consideration. Unfortunately, this means that the choice to cut these names was made in favor of runtime. and likely won't change anytime soon.



Jessie Buckley, from left, winner of the award for best actress in a leading role for "Hamnet," Michael B. Jordan, winner of the award for best actor in a leading role for "Sinners," and Amy Madigan, winner of the award for actress in a supporting role for "Weapons," pose in the press room at the Oscars on Sunday, March 15, 2026, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP)

The powerful cinematography of films in 2025 will likely be studied by professionals for years to come. The winner for Best Cinematography, Autumn Durald Arkapaw, made

the rest of the nominees, put their best foot forward with their work this year, showing that love for the craft of cinematography has not died down one bit. If anything, it has been exaggerated

See OSCARS (pg. 9) for continued story

UTM English major dances through life

Ethan Tanner | Pacer Staff

Senior English major Kaley Fletcher Green is not only committed to being a full-time UT Martin student, but also to being a dance instructor, a musical theatre choreographer, a wife, a mother and a worship team member.

As the founder and chief instructor of the New Genesis Dance Company at the Paris Academy of the Arts, Green has treasured her lifelong passion for dance.

"I'm very musically and artistically inclined. Everything that you can do with music, I've done," said Green.

Green first started dancing as a hobby

when she was three years old, which lasted all the way through high school when she competed in Nashville and in Franklin in the 2020 and 2021 Music City competitions. Her dance group even earned an award at the 2021 Dance Worlds competition in Florida.

She finished her senior year of high school dancing with Natalie's Dance Network in 2022, but her relationship with the art form did not end quite yet. Once she graduated from Henry County High School in 2022, Green departed for the University of Memphis, only to leave after her freshman year.

"The professors were great. The

environment was great. I just really wanted to be closer to home because I'm a very big family person," said Green.

Green decided to enroll at UT Martin as an English major, where she could finish her studies a short distance from home.

"I absolutely adore my department. I think all of my professors are great. My mentors are great. They deeply care about their students and their profession," said Green.

It was around this time when Green would be thrust back into the world of dance, this time as an instructor. Henry County High School was producing its spring 2023 production of "Mamma Mia," when theatre teacher Wendy Breedlove reached out to Green as a choreographer. She knew she could not decline the offer.

"That was my first time that I ever did anything on the musical theatre side of things. And I absolutely fell in love with it. I love the kids that were there and the environment. It was super fun," said Green.

Green was also contacted by Rhonda Stanton to choreograph shows for Paris's Krider Performing Arts Center (KPAC) starting with "The Spongebob Musical" in summer 2023. The performances were a success but there was one problem: the only dance studio in town had just closed.

Green had originally set up a five-year plan to start her very own dance studio, but now she faced no other option than to start it within five months. Despite the hurry, Green

established the New Genesis Dance Company in June 2024 on the top floor of the Paris Academy of the Arts.

"I already knew the name was going to be New Genesis. Genesis just means creation. God put that on my heart and that's what I've been following with. I just wanted a space and environment for people to feel comfortable to create in, no matter what that looks like, no matter your experience in it," said Green.

At New Genesis, Green offers classes for all of the different age groups across the many different genres of dance, whether it is jazz, tap, hip-hop, ballet or lyrical.

Green has especially been impacted by her high school class, many of whom she met when choreographing musical theatre.

"I absolutely adore my high school students. I think they're great. I think we have a lot of inside jokes. I think just making memories has been my favorite part of being a dance instructor," said Green.

Owen Wade, a junior Henry County High School student in Green's high school dance class, has plenty of good experiences learning from her.

"Kaley just always makes the choreography cool but also simple enough to where everybody can get it. If they can't get it, she always will accommodate for them," said Wade.

See DANCE (pg. 9) for continued story.



UT Martin senior English major Kaley Fletcher Green instructs her high school dance class at the Paris Academy of the Arts on Tuesday, March 3, in Paris, Tennessee. (Pacer Photo / Ethan Tanner)

2026 Line Dance promotes unity across chapters

Ja'Tyria Greer | Pacer Staff

The annual Greek Fest Line Dance at the University of Tennessee at Martin brought high energy, bright colors and months of preparation to the Skyhawk Fieldhouse on March 3 at 7 p.m. Line Dance is a longstanding fraternity and sorority life tradition at UT Martin. Organizations compete in choreographed routines performed around a large square, blending synchronized steps, creative formations and crowd engagement. The competition is known for its intensity and showmanship, far from a traditional line dance. Students filled the stands as fraternities and sororities from multiple councils showcased routines they had practiced for weeks. Each group aimed to stand out with precision, personality and unity. For Daviona Gbee, a senior and member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., this year's performance carried special meaning. "What makes my performance unique is the fact that I was able to do this with my sisters for the last time before I graduate," Gbee said. "We were able to bring that 'kaptivating' energy and have fun while doing so."

Gbee said events like Line Dance highlight more than choreography. "Events like this really showcase my organization's value of community and togetherness," she said. She added that the competition fosters unity beyond individual chapters. "Line Dance helped my chapter with unity through networking with other councils," Gbee said. "It helped us understand that though we may be a part of different organizations, events such as this help us to share our diverse styles and traditions." First-year students also experienced the tradition for the first time. Rory Long, a first-year student and member of Alpha Gamma Rho, said participating in Line Dance exceeded his expectations. "It was amazing. I loved every second of it," Long said. "I will definitely come back again next year." Long also said the environment created during the event reflects the broader values of Greek life on campus. "I think the environment we build here is just wonderful," he said. "All of Greek life here is so appreciated. I feel like we all try to do our best for the community and for the school itself." Preparation for the event required significant commitment. Long said his

organization practiced for about two months, meeting two or three days a week. "We've been practicing since the first month of the semester," said Long. Kara Preston, a junior UT Martin student and member of Alpha Delta Pi said the event required hard work but was ultimately rewarding. "I had so much fun during this event," said Preston. "It was really tiring, a lot of hard work put into it, but it was pretty good." When asked about the highlight of the experience, Preston emphasized the bond formed during preparation. "Getting ready with my sisters and also just practicing and trying to get it good," said Preston. "Even though if we mess up, we mess up. I just believe that we should just have a good time, and that's exactly what happened." At the conclusion of the competition, winners were announced across council divisions. In the Collegiate Panhellenic Council sorority division, third place went to Chi Omega, second place to Alpha Omicron Pi and first place to Zeta Tau Alpha. In the Interfraternity Council division, third place was awarded to Pi Kappa Alpha, second place to Kappa Alpha Order and first place to Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

In the National Pan-Hellenic Council sorority division, third place went to Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., second place to Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., and first place to Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. In the National Pan-Hellenic Council fraternity division, first place was awarded to Alpha Phi Alpha. As music echoed through the Skyhawk Fieldhouse and students cheered from the stands, the night reflected more than competition. It showcased months of discipline, collaboration and pride across Greek organizations on campus. While trophies and bragging rights are part of the tradition, participants said the true reward lies in unity both within chapters and across councils. For seniors like Gbee, it marked a final performance with lifelong friends. For first-year students like Long, it was the beginning of a tradition they hope to continue. Greek Fest Line Dance once again proved to be one of the most anticipated and spirited events of the spring semester at UT Martin which reinforced a sense of community that extended well beyond the square on the floor.



The Pacer

The Pacer is UTM's student-run newspaper and we would love to have you join our team! **All majors** are welcome to apply and **pay starts at \$9/hour**. Our only required meeting time is **Wednesdays at 5 p.m. in Gooch 311**. Other than that, you and your editor work together to **set your own hours**, and you get paid when you submit content.

- News
- Opinion
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Email your resume and any previous work samples to faculty advisor Dr. Plotner at kplotner@utm.edu to apply.



PHOTO GALLERY: OVC 2026 Tournaments



UT Martin sophomore forward Zy Thompson (12) shoots for two points at the 2026 OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 4, 2026. **(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)**



UT Martin junior guard Brittani Wells (2) and sophomore forward Zy Thompson (12) closes out on defense against SUIE at the 2026 OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 4, 2026. **(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)**



Left:UT Martin Basketball freshman guard Filip Petkovski (32) tries for two points at the 2026 OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 6, 2026. **(Pacer Photo /Chloe Kent)**



UT Martin Basketball junior forward Andrija Bukumirović (0) prepares a foul shot at the 2026 OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 6, 2026. **(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)**



UT Martin Basketball freshman guard Damien King (5) passes the ball to sophomore guard Filip Radaković (33) at the OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 5, 2026. **(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)**



UT Martin Basketball senior forward Luca Colceag (77) defends opponent for offensive rebound against EIU at the 2026 OVC Basketball Championship tournament at Ford Center in Evansville, Ind. on March 5, 2026. **(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)**



IRAN from page 1

Kent, a former Green Beret and political candidate with connections to right-wing extremists, was confirmed last July on a 52-44 vote. As head of the National Counterterrorism Center, he was in charge of an agency tasked with analyzing and detecting terrorist threats. Kent's decision came down to the reasoning behind the strikes on Iran, he wrote in his resignation letter.

His resignation demonstrates that the unease about the war within Trump's base extends to at least one senior member of his Republican administration. The leadership change comes at a time of heightened concern about terrorism following several recent violent attacks in the U.S.

Kent's military background and his personal story of sacrifice made him a compelling figure among Trump supporters. Before joining Trump's administration, Kent ran two unsuccessful campaigns for Congress in Washington state. As a Green Beret, he saw combat in

11 deployments before retiring to join the CIA. He also endured tragedy: His wife, a Navy cryptologist, was killed by a suicide bomber in 2019 in Syria, leaving him with two young sons. Kent, 45, has since remarried.

During the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Kent criticized what he said was a misguided desire for nation building by some in Washington, D.C. "It speaks to our hubris," Kent told reporters while campaigning for Congress. "For us not to have learned from all this just shows that there are people making money and making their careers at the other end of it. They've been doing it on the backs and dead bodies of U.S. soldiers."

During his 2022 congressional campaign, Kent paid Graham Jorgensen, a member of the far-right military group the Proud Boys, for consulting work. He also worked closely with Joey Gibson, the founder of the Christian nationalist group Patriot Prayer, and attracted support from a variety of far-right figures.

Oil prices continue to rise
According to the American

Automobile Association, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline jumped to \$3.79 on Tuesday, up from \$2.98 before the U.S. and Israel launched the war against Iran. That's the most expensive since October 2023.

State averages for regular gas now range from about \$3.21 to more than \$5.54 a gallon, per AAA data.

Jet fuel prices are also rising as the war in the Middle East disrupts global oil supplies, putting cost pressure on airlines as the busy summer travel season approaches.

Experts say it's not a question of if airfares will go up, but when, for how long and by how much. The impact may be felt most on long-haul international routes, which burn significantly more fuel than shorter flights.

Some airlines outside of the U.S. have announced fare increases or fuel surcharges in an effort to offset the growing expense. In the U.S., United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby recently warned that airfare increases will "probably start quick" as increasing fuel costs work their way through the industry.

The war is constraining oil

exports and prompting major producers like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to scale back output as shipments face growing obstacles.

Iran has attacked commercial ships across the Persian Gulf and targeted oil infrastructure in Gulf Arab nations following U.S. and Israeli strikes. The attacks have effectively halted traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage that carries about one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

The volatile crude oil prices causing retail gasoline prices to swing up sharply have had the same effect on the price of jet fuel. The average price in the U.S. reached \$3.99 per gallon on Friday, up from \$2.50 the day before the war started two weeks ago, according to the Argus U.S. Jet Fuel Index. The index tracks the average price airlines pay for jet fuel across major U.S. airports.

Figures from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics show that U.S. airlines paid about \$2.36 per gallon for fuel in January, the most recent data available.

COSPLAY from page 5

If it's not adult night hours, bear in mind that there will usually always be minors at these conventions. Be mindful of their feelings and hard work with their own cosplays. It's not polite to complain about them existing in convention spaces.

"Even though there are a lot of adults there, it is not an adult-only space. There are still going to be kids there. Remember that you had to start somewhere too," said Toni

Collins, an interdisciplinary studies student from Memphis, Tennessee.

If you want to go to these conventions and cosplay, and you want a cost-effective way to cosplay after buying expensive tickets, here are a few tips to make your con-going easier.

Try shopping local or maybe a town over. Goodwill and surrounding thrift stores like Jesus Cares are good ways to find supplies without breaking the bank. Find some local craft stores selling things for you to hand-make items.

Cardboard and hot glue are going to be some of your best friends when

creating props, even papier-mache and some paint. The cheap acrylic paint at Walmart costs 97 cents, and brushes at Dollar Store are good to use.

"Bring a sewing kit if you're a cosplayer. Things will always break," said Mikala Bates, a UT Martin alum from Humboldt, Tennessee.

Sewing will be one of your biggest assets when creating cosplay from scratch. YouTube tutorials for working the sewing machine at the Creator Space in the Paul Meek Library are also a worthwhile resource.

Some upcoming conventions if you're interested in going:

MTAC Super (April 3-5, 2026 — Nashville, Tennessee), Fanboy Expo Anime, Toy & Gaming (March 28-29, 2026 — Knoxville, Tennessee), GalaxyCon Nashville (May 29-31, 2026 — Nashville, Tennessee), AkaiCon 12 (June 26-28, 2026 — Lebanon, Tennessee) and Anime Blues Con (July 10-12, 2026 — Memphis, Tennessee).

These are just conventions in Tennessee that are taking place until July. There are more out there if you search for them. Convention season is here, be respectful and have fun.

OSCARS from page 9

The category for Best Picture was the most contested that it's been in a very long time. Films like "Marty Supreme," "Bugonia," "Sinners," "One Battle After Another," etc., are all standout films in a year chock-full of them. In the end, though, there can only be one winner. When it was all said and done, the film

taking home the title of Best Picture was "One Battle After Another."

After the nominees for the category were announced, it felt as if fans had already decided on which films they thought deserved the acclaim. It truly came down to "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another" for what the people thought deserved to win it the most. Despite this loss, it's important to understand the cultural impact both of these movies had. It's nice to

see that stories with complicated plots and characters can still be enjoyed by a wide audience. All nominated films exemplified the absolute best of cinema and that's something that everyone involved with each of these projects can be proud of.

The 98th Academy Awards ceremony has come and gone and it brought many amazing moments with it. The very best of 2025 received their flowers and showcased a variety of talents from

many different craftspeople. It was an iconic year for cinema, but it was only the beginning of what seems to be a renaissance. The pipeline of movies for 2026 and 2027 is getting larger every day with each film being more promising than the last. With everything changing across the globe, it's nice to know that films are as reliable as ever.

DANCE from page 9

Amidst her profession in dance, Green has been tasked with many other brand new challenges, which include her duties as both a wife and a mother.

"So funnily enough, I actually got married. We kind of eloped, if you will. We got married on April 30, 2023, the year before our actual ceremony," said Green.

She and her husband, Jordan, have been married for nearly three years, and have stood beside one another every step of the way. It did not take

long before Green gave birth to her daughter, Selah, on July 29. Now that she has her very own family, Green has faced some difficulties managing the pressure that stems from her many commitments. Despite the struggle, Green has relied on her faith to walk her through all of her concerns.

"I know that without God's hand in this, it would not be able to be where it is today. And I fully give all of the credit to him. Obviously, hard work, dedication and work ethic are going to get you far in life. But ultimately, I leave it up to his hands and I do as much work as I can," said Green.

Green has stayed committed to

her faith for many years, attending the Tennessee Valley Community Church since she was in middle school. As a devoted member, Green regularly serves her church as a singer on its worship team alongside Jordan, who serves as the drummer.

Aside from her loaded schedule, Green looks forward to see what the future holds for her dance studio.

One of her students and assistant instructors, Logan Barnhart, a senior Henry County High School student who plans to attend UTM in the fall, views Green as a capable instructor and leader.

"She's always a good leader. She

always makes sure that everyone in the situation knows what they're doing and how to do it and she never leaves anyone behind," said Barnhart.

Green intends to hold classes for people of all ages, and strongly encourages anyone who is interested in dancing sign up.

"I hope it continues to, to grow, but I hope that we keep the core values that anybody can dance," Green said. "You're able to come in and let your worries of your social life or school kind of melt away while you're here."





MLB Rivalries: Bad blood in 2026

Isaiah Murphy | Pacer Staff

The 2026 Major League Baseball (MLB) regular season begins in a little over a week. There are many historic rivalries in baseball, as whenever your league exists for over a century, some teams are going to start to hate each other.

However some of these historic rivalries do not make the cut, as there are some that are more relevant to today's game.

Chicago Cubs vs. Milwaukee Brewers

Obviously, the Cubs most hated and bitter rivalry in the league is the I-55 series with the St. Louis Cardinals. However, the Cardinals look far from contenders this years, while the Cubs look like the Central favorites.

The National League Division Series last year with the Brewers, in which the Cubs lost in five games, was bitter and intense. The Brewers took the first two games of the series at home in American Family Field. The series then went down south to Wrigley Field, in which the Cubs tilted the scales and tied the series. The series then went back to Family Field, ending the Cubs title hopes.

That was a loss the Cubs won't forget for a long time. Also, the regular season meetings last year between the two ball clubs were heated, as the division was on the line. For a long time last season, the Brewers looked like the best team in baseball, forcing the Cubs to play their hearts out in every meet.

With the NL Central title being



Michael Busch of the Chicago Cubs hits a home run against the Milwaukee Brewers in Game 3 of the 2025 NLDS. (AP Photo/Nam Huh)

on the line this year, and the Cubs strengthening of their club, the meetings will be intense once more. They play each other for the first time on May 18, at Wrigley Field.

New York Yankees vs. Toronto Blue Jay

In a similar story to the Cubs, the Yankees most bitter rivalry is with the Boston Red Sox. While the Yankees and Sox are both good teams this year, the Blue Jays are more of a threat than the Sox after their recent run to the World Series.

In the ALDS, the Yankees were embarrassed in their four game loss to the Jays. The game two loss was an

unforgettable seven-run loss, with the Blue Jays routing the Yanks 13-7.

Aaron Judge and the Yankees need to get it together if they want to win the AL East this year. Furthering the rivalry is Jays first baseman, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. Guerrero displays a prominent animosity against the Yankees. After their victory against the Yankees, Guerrero exclaimed "DAAAA Yankees lose!"

The first series between the two rival ball clubs is May 18th at Yankee Stadium.

Los Angeles Dodgers vs San Diego Padres

The Padres finished second in the NL

West last season, while the Dodgers stole the division and won the World Series in cinematic fashion. While the two ball clubs did not meet last year in the playoffs, this is a passionate rivalry that we can expect some big games from.

The Dodgers are looking to be the first team to three-peat in MLB since the 1998-2000 Yankees. Winning the division and getting a bye in the first round will grant them the easiest trip possible.

The Dodgers and Padres meet for the first time on May 18, at Petco Park.

NIL from page 12

An example of this is someone like men's basketball guard Damien King, who has a NIL deal with Pepsi/Crush that he does signings, photoshoots and has posters for. It was an opportunity King is grateful for.

"I took the contract home and it took me two days because you have to read through it and go through it with your parents and stuff so everything can look right," said King. "And we read through it thoroughly and everything looked good and I said, 'Yes.' And within a month or two they got back to me and we had a photoshoot."

King is currently the only athlete at UTM with a national external NIL deal, but Bynum hopes it opens the door for more opportunities down the road. King says his teammates are happy for him.

"They always call me 'Crush' or 'Mr. Crush' or--AJ [Hopkins] actually came up with 'Crush man' and it just followed throughout the team," said King. "Some will call me 'Mr. OC' for Orange Crush. They crack jokes about it all the time, send little funny pictures, memes with like crush bottles or them by my poster in the chat so it's pretty fun."

However, for an athlete to be paid, they don't need to have a corporate sponsor anymore. Instead, they can receive payments from the school on a contract. Contracts are currently being drafted by UT Martin with the intention of having them ready for execution by April. Athletes, such



Freshman guard Damien King (5) goes up for a layup during the basketball game against Little Rock on Feb. 3, 2026, at the Elam Center in Martin, Tenn. (Pacer Photo by Kaniya Anthony)

as basketball players who have said they will return, will be signed with a signing bonus and a plan for what their payments would look like with revenue sharing through the 26-27 academic year.

Athletes on these contracts will be paid quarterly through direct deposit, and the athlete will register with the university as a contract employee.

Through these revenue share agreements, the athletic department has the ability to adjust payments; similar to how a pro athlete can be fined for certain actions according to their contract.

"In these revenue share agreements, what we're doing is we're identifying the values and standards that we want these athletes to uphold. If they don't

meet those values in standards, we are able to adjust the payments that they're getting," Bynum said. "So, somebody gets a DUI, you're not getting your payment for this semester. Even something as little as late to practice. We could cut their money for that."

With an increased role in the revenue of the school also comes an increased responsibility for the athletes that most people might not think of like taxes and a transition from being paid to play a sport to the workforce.

"When your career ends, that's difficult. That's very difficult for any athlete from a mental perspective. But now we've got athletes that are making, at big schools, millions of dollars, here at UTM, a reasonable salary. Some of them are making a reasonable salary

doing it," Bynum said. "And they go from that to not playing anymore to no income, and how do they transition, and how do they adapt to that? That's my concern. And that's why you're seeing kids that are clinging to playing college ball for so long because they don't know how to make that transition out of it or what's next for them."

Along with these massive changes in the NCAA landscape, the UTM athletic department faces an entirely different challenge. International students, such as the 13 international men's basketball players, are limited on how much they can work in the U.S. This tasks Bynum with ensuring players are meeting visa requirements along with new NCAA rules.

"It's difficult based on our resource level. You know, you've got me trying to figure it out, you know, where other schools have you know, uh an entire office dedicated specifically to NIL, revenue share, contract drafting, things like that," said Bynum. "I've got 17 other things I'm responsible for on top of that."

As the details of NIL continue to get worked out, it leaves smaller universities like UT Martin to sift through the details and learn what can and can't be done despite not having the same resources of other larger schools.

"The fact that it is something that we're engaging with here at our level might be a surprise, but, you know, it's what we have to do," Bynum said. "We have to figure it out and we have to continue to stay on top of the trends and use it to our advantage as best as we can."



Student-Athlete Spotlight: Allie Maxwell

Ryleigh Ulen | Pacer Staff

Student-athletes come from across the United States to join the University of Tennessee at Martin rodeo team, but for Allie Maxwell, UTM Rodeo is a home-grown affair.

For Maxwell, a senior agricultural business major from Milan, Tennessee, her start in rodeo began with a push from her parents to be involved in some kind of activity. After trying several things, her mom suggested she begin taking horse-riding lessons. She started competing only a year later and hasn't looked back since.

Maxwell's rodeo experience led her to UT Martin, where she participated in rodeo events hosted at the university. According to Maxwell, the events at UT Martin not only allowed her to meet members of the rodeo community in Martin, but it also put the idea of being a collegiate rodeo student-athlete on her radar.

The combination of the rodeo program, her experiences in Martin and its proximity to her hometown made UT Martin the perfect choice to continue both her education and her rodeo career.

"I've known this place my whole life, and I know so many people up here, and it just felt like home," said Maxwell. "It's one of the only places that did."

For any rodeo athlete, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that keeps everything running smoothly and safely. For Maxwell and the other rodeo athletes at



Allie Maxwell rides her horse Nightmare in the Girls Barrel Racing event at the 57th annual UT Martin Spring College Rodeo on April 19, 2025, in the Ned McWherter Agricultural Complex. **(Photo Credit/ University Relations)**

UT Martin, they have to balance their rodeo responsibilities with the already demanding responsibilities of a college student.

According to UTM Rodeo Head Coach Chase Thrasher, who is also a former UTM Rodeo athlete, people are not always aware of what being a rodeo student-athlete entails.

"I don't think that a whole lot of people understand the responsibilities that rodeo athletes, especially at college rodeo, have to go through," said Thrasher. "There's just a lot more that goes into it than the general population understands."

For Allie, one of the biggest

responsibilities is ensuring the welfare of her horses.

"Probably the biggest thing that's outside of normal school for us is we have to take care of our horses," said Maxwell. "If we don't have our horses, we obviously can't compete. So we have to be able to take them to the vet to get their shoes done, to get all their feed and all their medicine, everything they need to be able to perform at their best level."

Along with the extra work required of a rodeo student-athlete, Maxwell takes the time to ensure the success of her fellow teammates.

For Ryanne Frecker, a senior

agricultural business major from Lizton, Indiana, and member of the rodeo team, Maxwell was a big part of her transition to Martin.

"I came in my freshman year with her, and we ended up in the same SOAR group together when we toured," said Frecker. "She was the first girl I met in Martin... she kind of took me in under her wing. Now that we're seniors, it's kind of sad...it feels like it flew by, but also like we've gone through five lifetimes together."

For Maxwell, being a part of UT Martin's rodeo team is a full-circle moment.

Kenley McCarn shows teammates the way through her own hard work

William Stevens | Pacer Staff

After an up and down season for the UT Martin Skyhawks women's basketball team, redshirt junior guard Kenley McCarn was named to the All-OVC first team. This honor adds to an already decorated list that includes 12 academic honors, eight weekly honors and five weekly honors.

Some of McCarn's Honors include, but are not limited to, six-time Athletic Director's Honor Roll, six-time OVC Freshman of the Week, two-time OVC Player of the Week and 2024-25 OVC Preseason Player to Watch. McCarn has spent all four years of her college basketball career at UT Martin. She led the Skyhawks in scoring and was fourth in the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC), in the regular season, with 16.0 points per game (PPG). She was also second in rebounds behind redshirt sophomore forward Zy Thompson, with 5.3 rebounds per game (RPG). McCarn has also graduated with a degree in accounting and finance, and is currently pursuing a masters degree in business administration.

Before arriving at UT Martin, McCarn attended Melbourne high school in Melbourne, Arkansas. She led the Bearkatz to four straight state championships. While there, McCarn recorded a career high of 44 points.

When choosing UT Martin, McCarn's decision was heavily affected by head coach Kevin McMillan.

"I knew coach McMillan was the coach that everyone was gonna play hard for. There were no exceptions," Said McCarn. "It

was never who was necessarily the most talented. So I knew that UT Martin is where I was going to fit in."

In her four years, McCarn has also established herself in a leadership role which she takes pride in. On the court McCarn would describe herself as a lead by example kind of teammate.

"Definitely (lead) by example, which is something that really frustrates Coach McMillan because he tries to get me to, say all these things or, you know, get people to do stuff and my main thing that I've always done as a leader is I'm going to show you how to do it. That is something that I've had to grow into as a leader, learning how to do, how to lead people in other ways too, mainly I want to make sure I'm doing it myself because I don't feel like I have the right to vocally say something if I'm not going to do it myself," said McCarn.

Junior guard Brittani Wells says McCarn fueled every practice and game with her good work ethic.

"She's just the hardest worker out there. You can tell it's a big difference just in everything she does. She goes very hard. She takes no plays off in practice, she takes it serious," said Wells. "She is very dependable and, it showed all season, she was consistent. I knew I could count on her because she stayed in the gym. She always did the extra work, I could depend on her because she's done this, you know, thousands of times she puts in the work and she's passionate about it and I know I can count on her."

McCarn also recalled some great moments here as a Skyhawk. Some of those being her 40-point performance



UT Martin junior guard Kenley McCarn pushes the ball up the court against SIUE on Jan. 15, 2026 at the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center in Martin, Tennessee. **(Photo Credit/Kaniya Anthony)**

and her trips to the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) tournaments, but her favorite moment was the opportunity to play in NCAA tournament.

During the 2023-24 college basketball season, the Skyhawks booked their trip to the tournament, competing in the first four for the 16 seed against the Holy Cross Crusaders. Unfortunately for the Skyhawks, that is where the team's season would come to an end as UT Martin lost 72-45.

"Two years ago when we went to the NCAA tournament, I don't think anyone that year thought that we were going to be able to do it. We were only playing five people and, I mean, it was pretty incredible that we were able to pull it off and the experience to go to the tournament

was amazing," said McCarn.

McCarn wants to be remembered for her hard work as a Skyhawk and how much time she has put into the game, but she is also unsure of what her future looks like in basketball. Whether that is coaching or playing overseas, there is uncertainty in the future.

"Really, I'm not sure on that. I think I would like to be a basketball coach, but I'm really trying to not get myself to do that. But I could see myself wanting to be a coach or I would even like to go overseas, which is a little scary, so I would have to talk myself into it," said McCarn.

As it stands, McCarn has another year of eligibility and plans to return to UT Martin for her fifth year.



How NIL is changing UT Martin athletics

Chyler Lee | Pacer Staff

On May 7, 2025, the final House v. NCAA settlement decided that colleges could directly pay athletes from internally as opposed to the outside collectives and deals needed for athletes previously--a decision set to change the outlook of collegiate athletics for at least the next 10 years that the agreement is in place.

Major changes include scholarship-based roster limits and internal revenue sharing, two fronts that will have a large impact on how UT Martin athletics approach recruiting.

Tasked with handling and ensuring that the Skyhawks are compliant with each new change on the Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) front is Senior Associate Athletic Director for Internal Operations Ashley Bynum, who was hired in March of 2017. Bynum is a UTM alumnus as well as a licensed attorney after she earned her law degree from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 2016. After graduation, Bynum was a private practice lawyer before she was approached by UTM about her current position.

"A lot of the things that have to be done from the compliance aspect look very similar to what I was doing in private practice. Just instead of going before a judge, we're talking to the NCAA," said Bynum. "So, it really piqued my interest because I am a huge sports fan. I love watching sports. And I played sports growing up. I did not play in college, but I've just always loved athletics. And I've always loved school. So, to have the opportunity to be in an environment where I'm working directly with athletes, I'm in a school setting and I still get to, you know, exercise those legal skills that I have. It really felt like this job was kind of made for me."

A big win for schools like UTM at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) level was the introduction of roster spots and a salary cap instead

of scholarship limitations on athletics.

Moving forward, the NCAA will determine a cap each year for the amount of revenue share money that universities can allocate to athletes--\$22 million is where it will start with a number near \$30 million being possible near the end of the 10-year agreement.

Previously, a roster was limited by the number of scholarships and nearly unlimited in terms of salary allocated to the roster, but now, if a school opts into the agreement, then their roster for a football team will be 105 spots instead of 85 spots with 63 scholarships. This meant teams in the SEC could recruit players for walk-on spots but still pay them like a scholarship player through external NIL collectives. Now schools will have to allocate money throughout the roster and entire athletic department more carefully.

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"So now, whether you're at UTM, MTSU, the University of Tennessee, or wherever, you've got 105 football players on the team. So, we've limited schools' ability to kind of hoard those players and



Hardy M. Graham Stadium is pictured on Sept. 13, 2025 during the Skyhawks football home opener against the SIU Salukis. (Pacer Photo/Kayli Plotner)

give them money in ways that are not scholarship dollars. So, we can see that trickle down again, and we've got quality players that are getting opportunities across the board as opposed to everybody's at Tennessee," Bynum said. "So that really helps us, because that gives us the opportunity to get some of that higher talent because there's so limited spots at the bigger schools."

The larger schools will be able to fund their programs and hit the cap pretty easily, but for FCS schools like UTM, the numbers won't come close to the cap. UT Martin will instead go through donors, fundraisers and other revenue generating avenues to fund what they can spend on players.

"What we don't want to do is lose players to schools in the mid-major range that can give them a couple thousand dollars that we might not be able to give them," Bynum said. "So we've got to find a way to give them

that couple thousand dollars so that that UTM becomes a valid option for them as opposed to a Youngstown State or a Western Kentucky or something like that, where they've got a little more resources than us and could make a bigger offer than we could in most circumstances."

Before the most recent ruling, athletes were able to be paid through NIL, however, it had to be from outside of the school. This came in the form of either local/national sponsorship or through NIL collectives. UT Martin has only had six athletes receive payment from an external collective partnered with the school. Most other UTM athletes get paid by outside sponsors.

See NIL (pg 10) for continued story

UT Martin's loss in OVC semifinals ends season

Nate Szarzynski | Pacer Staff

The UT Martin Skyhawks men's basketball season came to close after losing to the Tennessee State Tigers in the semifinals of the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) Championship Tournament in Edwardsville, Ind.

In UT Martin's third matchup of the season against TSU, the Tigers completed the sweep as they defeated the Skyhawks in all three contest this season.

Similar to the season finale, TSU junior guard Aaron Nkrumah led the game in scoring with 19 points. The Tigers were able to take the lead early in the first half and never give it back.

UT Martin continued to battle, but the offense could not find enough momentum and the team never regained the the lead.

The leading scorer for the Skyhawks was standout junior forward Andrija Bukumirovic with 17 points and five rebounds.

All season long, UT Martin has faced all sorts of hardships. Despite all of those challenges, the team tied the universities all-time season win total with 22 wins and a deep OVC Tournament run.

"I think it speaks to our guys

character," said UT Martin's head coach Jeremy Shulman. "This team, the people, this program, the coaching staff, the administration and of course the players were just such a joy to coach every single day. There were no bad days."

UT Martin lost their starting point guard, sophomore Dragos Lungu, early in the season. In six games played, Lungu averaged 13 points, 5.3 rebounds and 2.8 assists. Shulman said there was a lot of uncertainty when he learned he would be without Lungu the rest of the season.

"We have just faced a lot of adversity. With Lungu going out in the sixth game ---especially with such a young team we had. There were a few days (after the injury) where I thought gosh how are we going to do this?," Shulman said. "It was next man up all year. We had 10 different leading scorers all year. We had a ton a ton of different starting lineups and it was always next man up."

Now that the season is over, Shulman and his staff have little to no time to savor the season. The team, who was already set to lose two contributors in senior forwards Luca Colceag and Lamine Niang, are now set to lose freshman



UT Martin freshman guard Matas Deniusas (44) dribbling the ball up the court to set up a play during the basketball game against SEMO on Feb. 17, 2026 at the Elam Center in Martin, Tenn. (Pacer photo/Kaniya Anthony)

standout forward Matas Deniusas, as his agency announced that the 11-time OVC Freshman of the Week intends to enter the transfer portal. Deniusas logged 26 minutes-per-

game (MPG), and started in 32 of the 33 games he played. Following injuries, Deniusas got the opportunity to play more minutes and fully took advantage. Deniusas ranked second on the team in points-per-game (PPG) and rebounds-per-game (RPG) following the injury to Lungu. Deniusas averaged 12.5 PPG and 5.2 RPG during his freshman season.

After the announcement of Deniusas's intention to enter the portal, Shulman went on X to congratulate his player. "Excited for Matas and his next opportunity! I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to coach Matas this year and be apart of his journey," posted Shulman.

The 15-day NCAA portal window opens on April 7. The portal rules were changed after prominent coaches were vocal about the previous 30-day window opening up in the middle of March Madness tournament play.

With the transfer portal becoming so prevalent in college sports, there is an expectation more Skyhawks could entertain the portal.

See page 8 for OVC photo gallery